

# Football Fuels Refueling Leader

by Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.  
photo by Staff Sgt. Jeanette Copeland

**L**t. Col. Bart Weiss is a commander whose 351st Air Refueling Squadron, Royal Air Force Mildenhall, England, is responsible for aerial refueling U.S. and NATO aircraft in the European theater covering some 20 million square miles over 91 countries.

However, he didn't always want to be a squadron commander. In 1985, he was an Air Force Academy quarterback who was the first in academy history to rush and pass for more than 1,000 yards in a season. Sports writers considered him a Heisman Trophy contender. Even the Atlanta Falcons courted Colonel Weiss during his senior year. Nevertheless, the only thing that could tear the football dreams from his hands was a career in the Air Force.

## From Ivy to Blue

His high school football coach, the son of a two-star general, urged Colonel Weiss to join the Air Force. Although he had his sights set on an Ivy League college, the young quarterback saw the benefits of the Air Force, as well.

"I loved to play football, and the Air Force offered everything that Dartmouth did," he said. "It was academically just as astute as an Ivy League school, and it was Division 1 football. It seemed like the right move."

More than 21 years later, it still feels like the right move for Colonel Weiss, who eventually married the daughter of his high school coach.

"It doesn't surprise me one bit that he's a commander in a very viable leadership position because he showed that when he was playing football here at the academy," said Fisher DeBerry, Falcons head coach since 1983.

The change from football player to squadron commander, although a two-decade transition, isn't as different as one might think. In fact, Colonel Weiss sees more similarities than differences.

"Football is a sport where you have

11 people from all walks of life with one goal in mind — to win a game — and the Air Force is just like that," he said. "It's a team of a whole bunch of people with one goal in mind — to complete the mission."

The colonel feels the best part of his job is interacting with squadron members on a daily basis. He reminds them how their jobs contribute to the mission as a whole, the way a coach would tell a player how his role fits in with the team.

"The opportunity to influence peo-

ple's lives and help people with their next assignments or their Air Force careers is exciting," said the Naples, Fla., native.

However, being a squadron commander isn't always sunshine and smiles. Sometimes members deviate from the course, and commanders must take corrective actions.

"It's tough being the point man and getting them back on track," he said. "It's an awesome responsibility, and it's how you carry it out that makes the difference."

## Bumper sticker messages

Perhaps the biggest challenge of being a squadron commander is battling the deluge of information that assaults a squadron on a daily basis, according to the lieutenant colonel.

"I ferret out information both up and down the chain of command," he said. "It's easy to just pass information on, but it's more difficult when you weed out only what people need to know and pass it on to your newest Airman basic and lieutenant so they can understand it."

He said the information he gives to his troops is so concise and to the point it could fit on a bumper sticker.

"It's an art. I think that's what makes a good squadron commander," he said.

As a commander, Colonel Weiss compares himself to the head coach of a football team. 🐦

*Tech. Sgt. Cindy Dorfner contributed to this story*



## Lt. Col. Bart Weiss

Commander, 351st Air Refueling Squadron, Royal Air Force, Mildenhall, England

**Years in service:** 18

**Hometown:** Naples, Fla.

**Reason for joining:** The Air Force Academy Falcons recruited him to play football.

**The best thing about the job:** Personally getting to know people in the unit.